

# BOOK REVIEW

## Perfect: Being Judged on Social Media

Gill, R. (2023). *Perfect: Being Judged on Social Media*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.  
ISBN: 978-1-509-54970-2. 256 pp. List price: \$22.95

*Review by Stephanie Ray, Librarian, St. Philip's College*

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**P***erfect: Being Judged on Social Media* by Rosalind Gill explores the challenges of social media on the rising Gen Z generation of women. Gill highlights the pressure of taking and creating the “perfect picture” and the anticipation of peer feedback before a post is made. Also discussed is the immense toll of social media on mental health (“more young people than ever before have mental health diagnoses, while at the same time there is an unprecedented crisis in mental health services (p. 9).” Participants share how the perceived perfection of others’ posts makes them feel as if they are not good enough, but how they also can't walk away from social media because it is their main source of social connection. Gill explores how these interviewees create a balance between who they want to be seen as and the pressure they feel to conform to a more socially acceptable form of themselves. The book breaks down this research into chapters to focus on key take away insights on specific topics (the beauty industry, sexual harassment). Chapters help organize the information for further research by others while creating a narrative flow.

Gill highlights how younger generations recognize that what they are seeing online is not a true representation of life, or even a life they want: “[T]hey may be angry about it, but they also feel they have to live up to it. (p. 50)” This line captures the truly complex nature of social media’s influence on life and the perverse expectations that it creates.

This book makes excellent observations on the difficulties of navigating social media and how these challenges resonate deeply in the lives of Gen Z. By focusing on Gen Z, Gill has given them a voice to showcase the fine balancing act of belonging yet feeling alone. Gill's book is a great resource for those looking into how social media connects and controls people's online personas and interactions with others—men, women, society, family, friends.

“So, it's like you lose... if it's not an amazing post, if it's not perfect, you lose confidence in yourself. But you also lose connections to other people who are posting the perfect images as well, I think.”

Even the choice of social network and how to post is rigorously debated internally by young women to ensure that their image is cultivated correctly. “The understanding of what makes a good post is shaped by the meanings given to particular platforms by young people- such as the ideas that Instagram is ‘for the best’, Snapchat ‘for your real friends’, ‘Facebook for family’, etc....”

Gill captures the complexity of her participants' relationship with social media and the fine line between authenticity and being perfect. Older readers of the books will sympathize with the struggles depicted, while Gen Z will feel as though someone finally captured their voice in explaining the Catch -22 of social media. This book is a great resource for delving into issues that 18-30-year-old women are facing in daily life, or as an informative read on how social media creates a need to appear perfect.